

THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES AND PTSD

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Roadmap

- Who am I?
- The Big Picture: Conceptual Framework
- Defining religion and spirituality (RS) & demographics
- RS and general mental health outcomes
- RS and PTSD/Trauma
- Q&A
- Experiential Exercise



Who am I?



Clinical Psychologist



Multicultural Clinical Scientist



Northwestern
University



UNIVERSITY OF
OREGON



JOHN
TEMPLETON
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Experiential Knowledge



The Big Picture: My Working Conceptualization



“Stuckpoints” of Psychologists



“Religion and Spirituality is (always) dangerous or harmful”

- Prominent psychologists such as Sigmund Freud, Albert Ellis, and Carl Jung have often disagreed about whether religion is helpful or harmful for people’s well-being (Plante, 2007)
- Freud (psychiatrist) referred to religion as an “obsessional neurosis” (Freud, 1927/1961, p. 43)
- Watson referred to it as a “bulwark of medievalism” (Watson, 1924/1983, p. 1)

“Stuckpoints” of Psychologists



“Religion and Spirituality is not in our lane”

“Psychologists are aware of and respect cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, **religion**, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status and consider these factors when working with members of such groups” (Ethics Code, APA, 2002).

“Stuckpoints” of RS individuals/Groups



“Psychology is of the devil” “Can’t we just pray away X?”

“Psychologists won’t understand my faith/are biased”

- Clinicians tend to be less religious than their clients, scoring lower on many measures of religiosity, including belief in God, the importance of religion, religious practices & religious affiliations (Delaney et al., 2007; 2013)
- Psychology has the highest number of atheist professors (50%) compared to any other disciplines (Gross & Simmons, 2009; Ecklund & Scheitle, 2007)
- Negative stereotypes and microaggressions against religious individuals (**Cheng**, Pagano & Shariff, 2017; Rios, **Cheng**, Totten & Shariff, 2015)

“Stuckpoints” of RS individuals/Groups

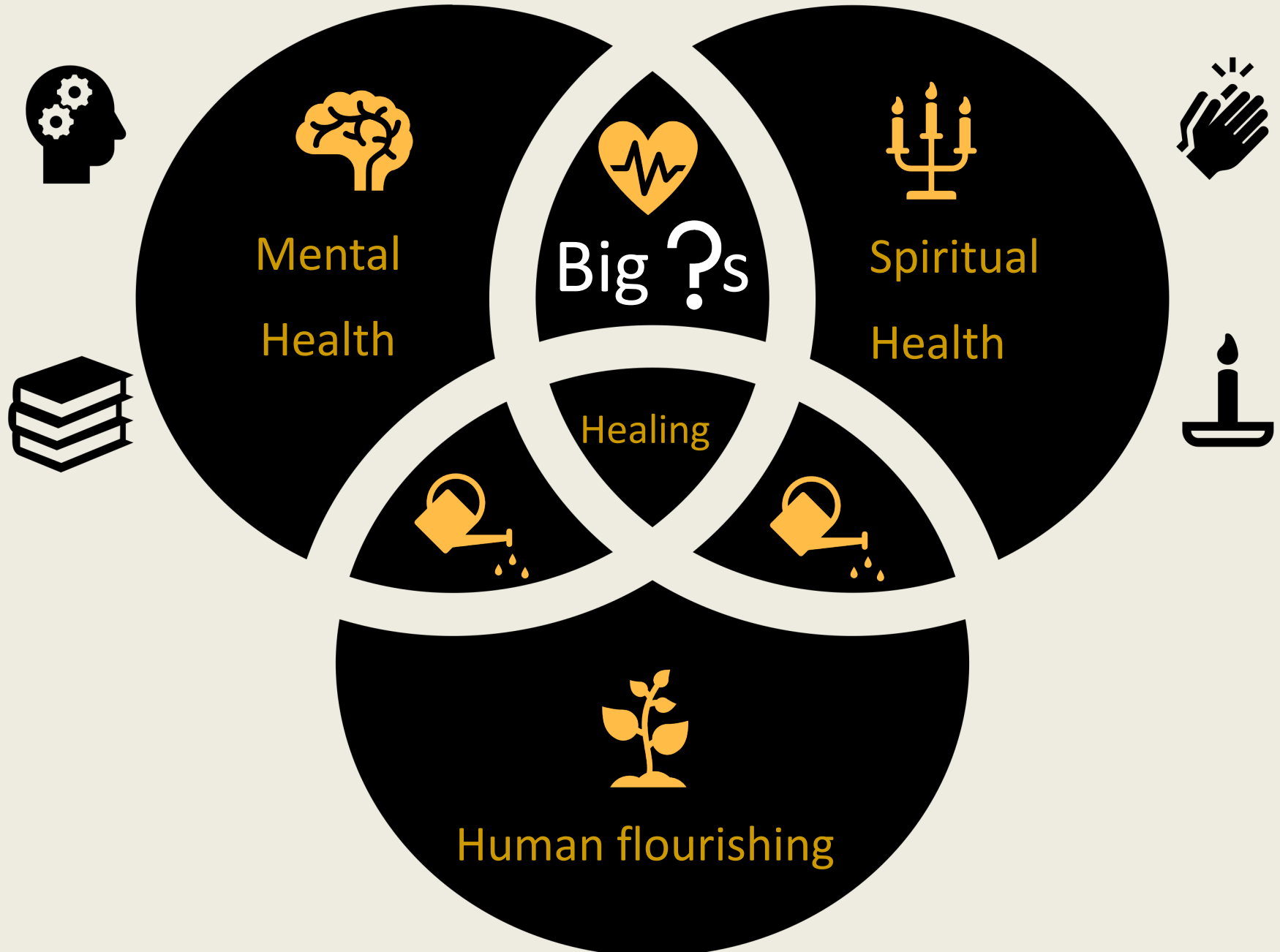


“Psychologists don’t know what to do with my faith”

- Many psychologists do not have formal training in integrating RS or the competencies related to RS (Vieten et al., 2016)
 - 87% of APA accredited psychology training programs never offer a formal course in R/S (Brawer et al., 2002)
 - 66% of current internship training directors say they have **never** offered training in R/S (Russell & Yarhouse, 2006)
- Most psychologists report that they do not include RS as part of psychological treatment, and do not discuss RS with most of their patients (Frazier & Hansen, 2009; Hathaway et al., 2004)

BUT the majority of psychologists (82%) believe there is a positive relationship between religion and mental health (Delaney et al., 2013)

The Big Picture: My Working Conceptualization



INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY



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Definitions of RS

Religion

- an organized system of beliefs and practices (Dew et al., 2008)
- associated with a specific institution (Fallot, 2001; Post & Wade, 2009)



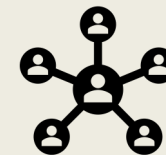
Beliefs



Practices

Spirituality

- incorporation of one's quest for meaning into one's values or behavior (Sperry, 2001)
- a connection with the transcendent (Post & Wade, 2009)
- personal searches for ultimate reality (Dew et al., 2008)



Community

a sense of deeper purpose, and ultimate meaning

a relationship with a higher power/transcendent reality (Fallot, 2001)

US RS Statistics

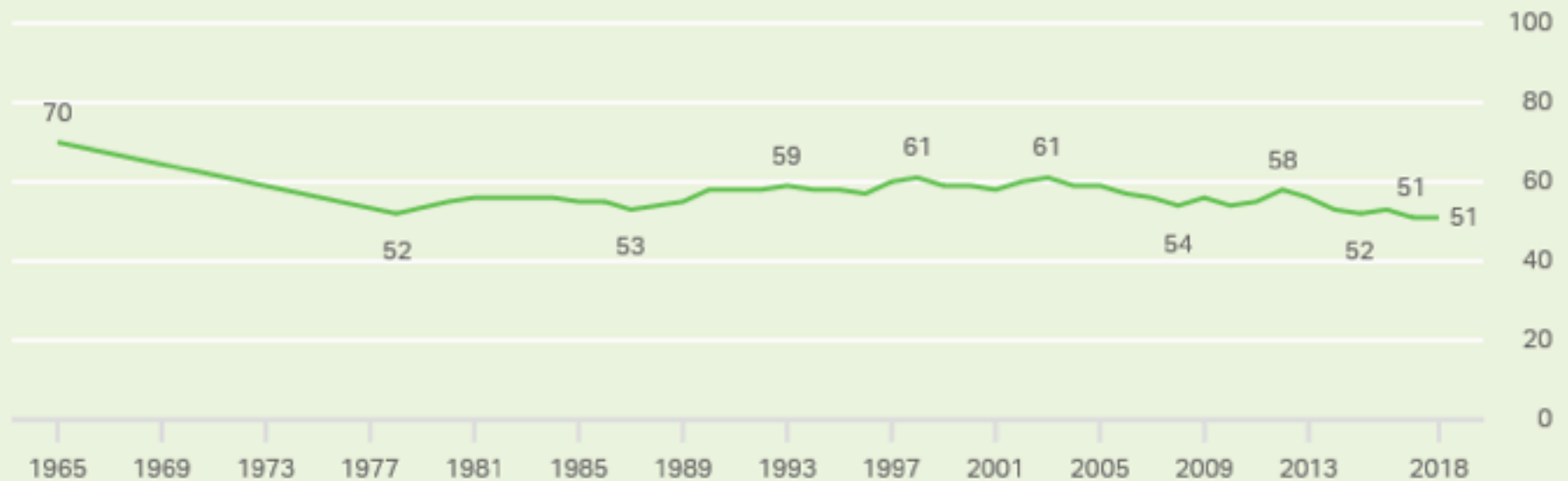
- The US is the most religious industrialized nation in the world [Pew Research Center (PRC), 2009]
- 87% of Americans believe in God (Gallup, 2017)
- 80% say they wish to grow spiritually (Gallup, 2011)
- 80% of those who attend religious services view science as having a positive impact on society (PRC, 2009).
- 68% are Christian, 2% Jewish, 5% Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and other religions combined (Gallup, 2017)

Importance of Religion

Importance of Religion to Americans, Yearly Averages

How important would you say religion is in your own life -- very important, fairly important or not very important?

■ % Very important



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Race and Religion in the US

African-Americans and Religion

GRAPHIC • January 30, 2009

A new [analysis](#) by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life finds that African-Americans are markedly more religious on a variety of measures than the U.S. population as a whole.



Print



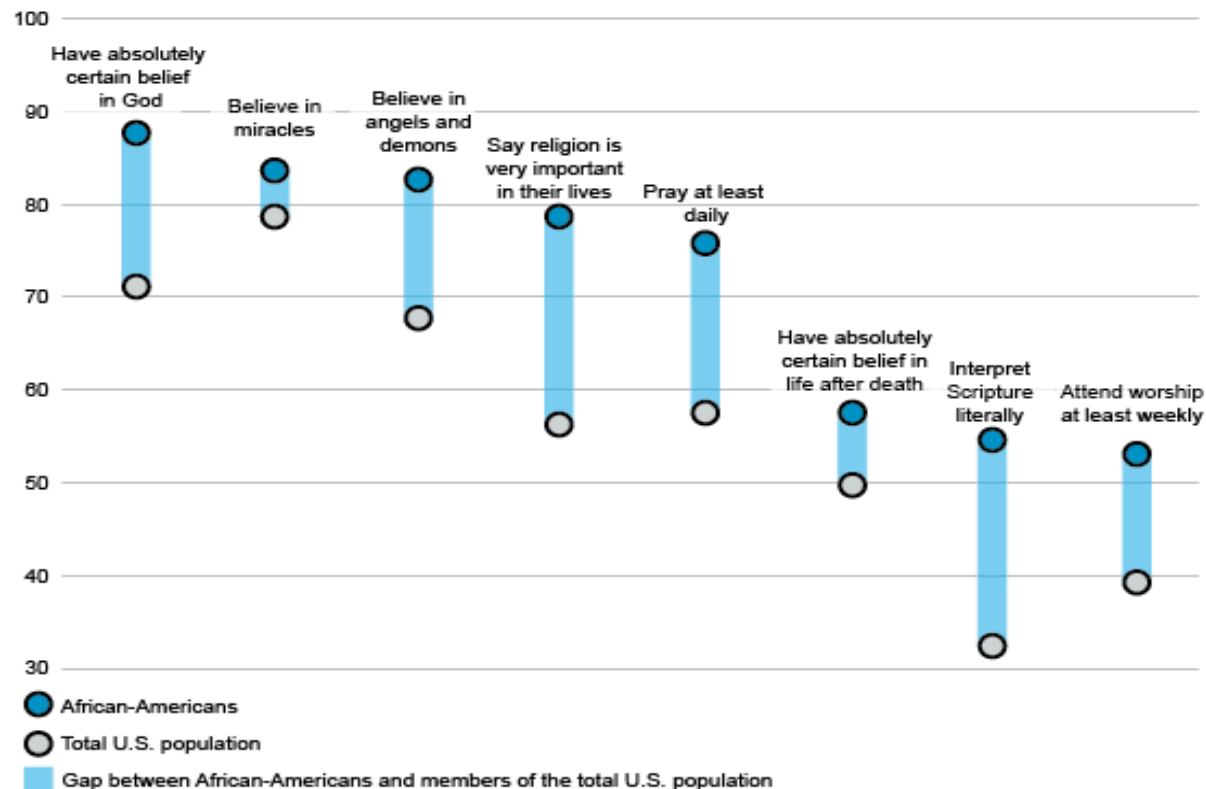
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% of each group who...



Race and Religion

Most Latino Evangelicals Pray Every Day

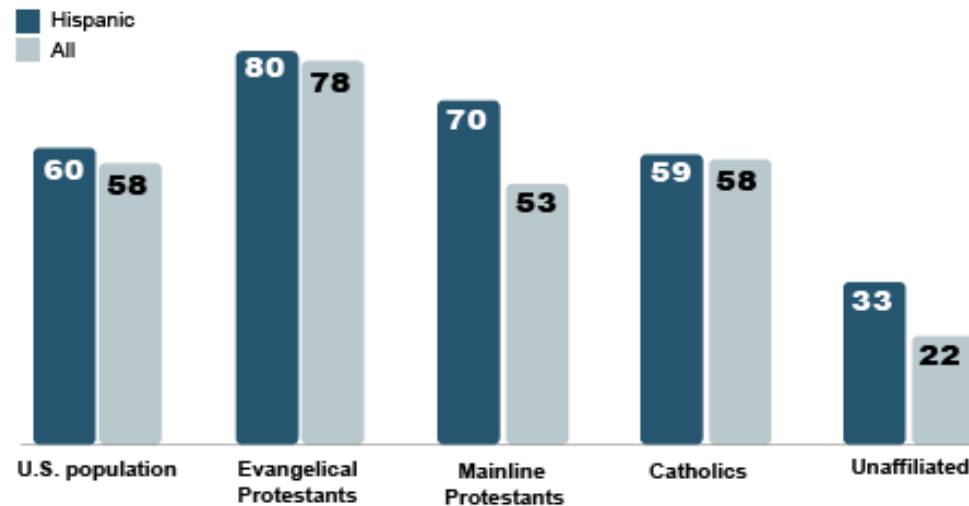
GRAPHIC • June 11, 2009

On June 17-19, hundreds of Hispanic evangelical church leaders will participate in the National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. The [U.S. Religious](#)

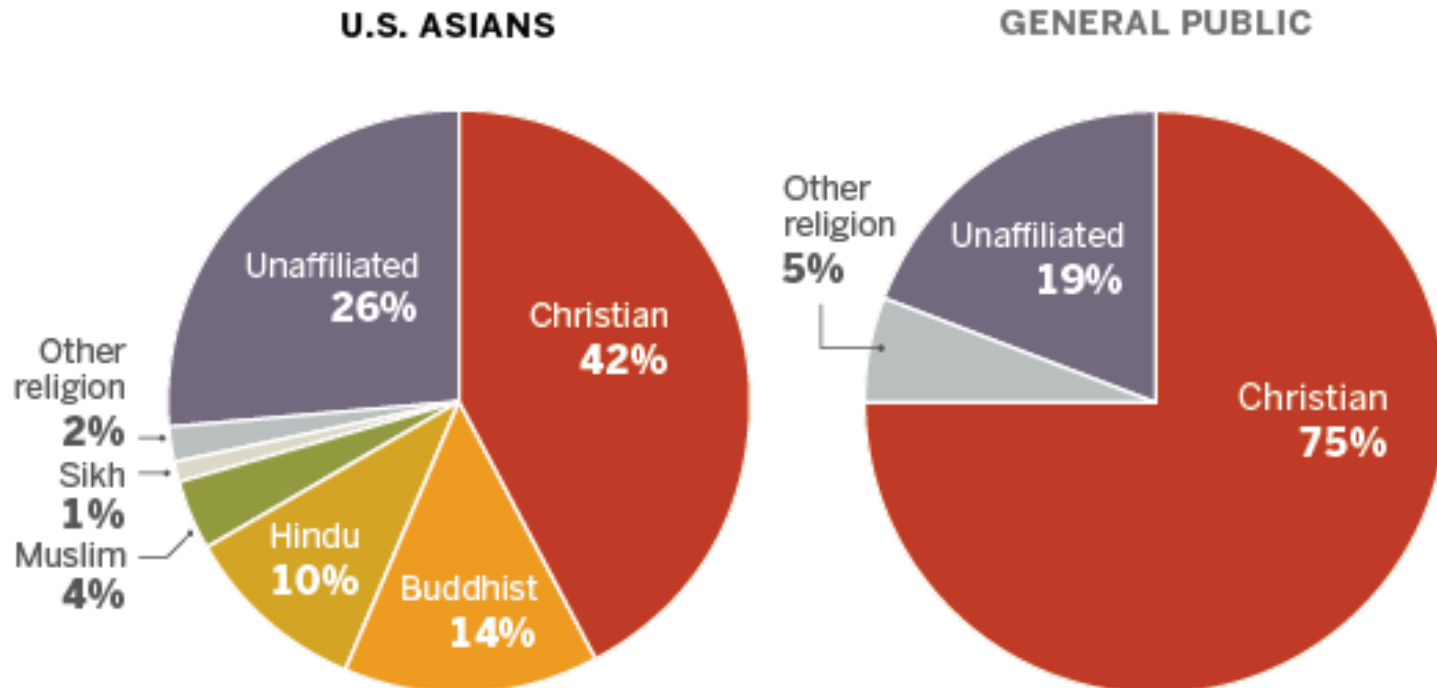
[Landscape Survey](#), conducted by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, finds that Hispanic evangelicals, like other evangelicals, are more likely to pray every day than the population overall. Hispanic evangelicals are also more likely to pray daily than Hispanics who belong to other major religious groups.

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% who pray at least once a day, among...



Race and Religion



Figures may not add to 100% because those who did not give an answer are not shown.

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Gender and Religion

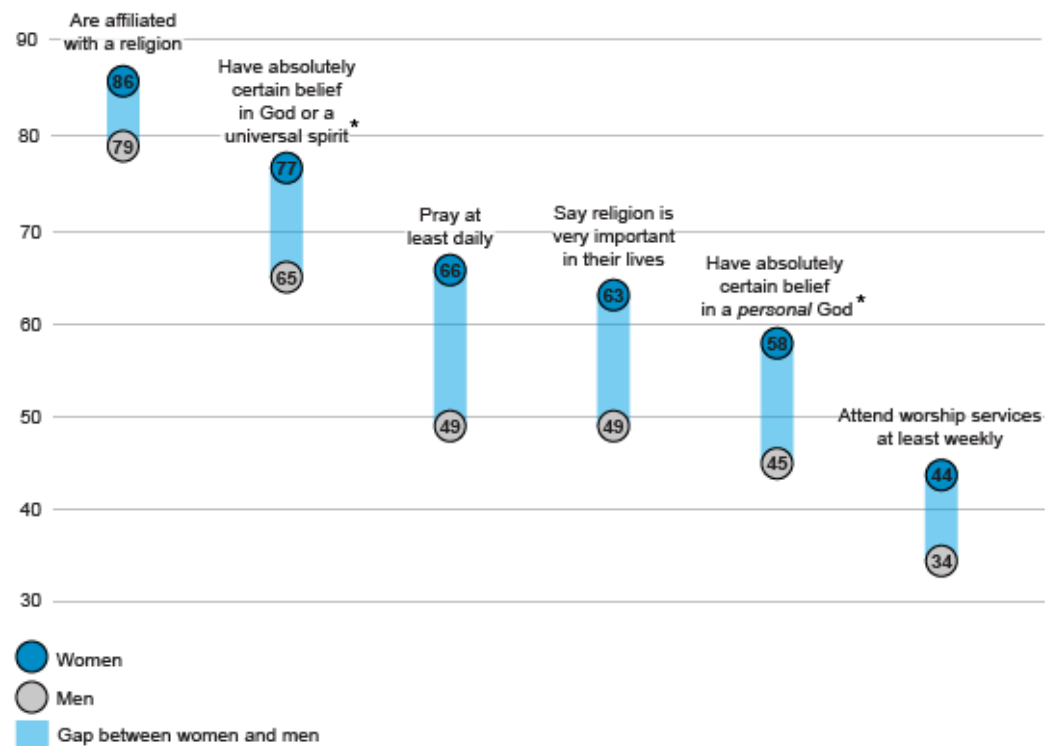
The Stronger Sex -- Spiritually Speaking

ANALYSIS • February 26, 2009

March is Women's History Month. A new analysis of data from the [U.S. Religious Landscape Survey](#), conducted by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, finds that women are more religious than men on a variety of measures.

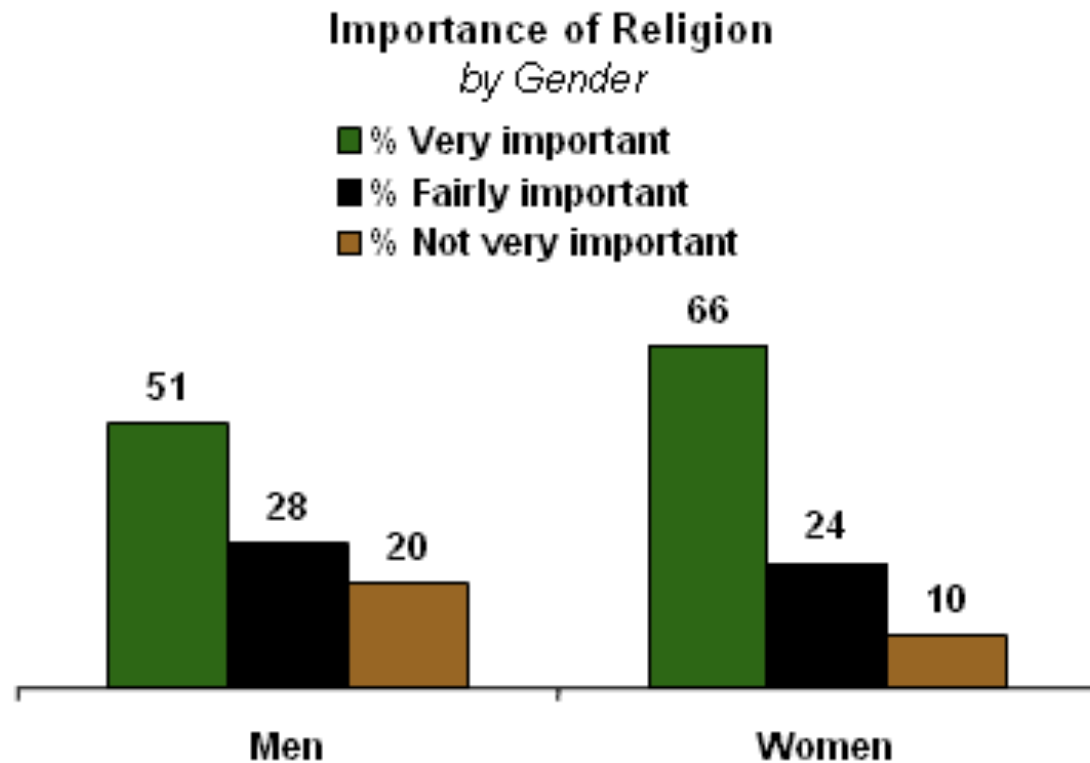
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% of women and men who...



Gender and Religion

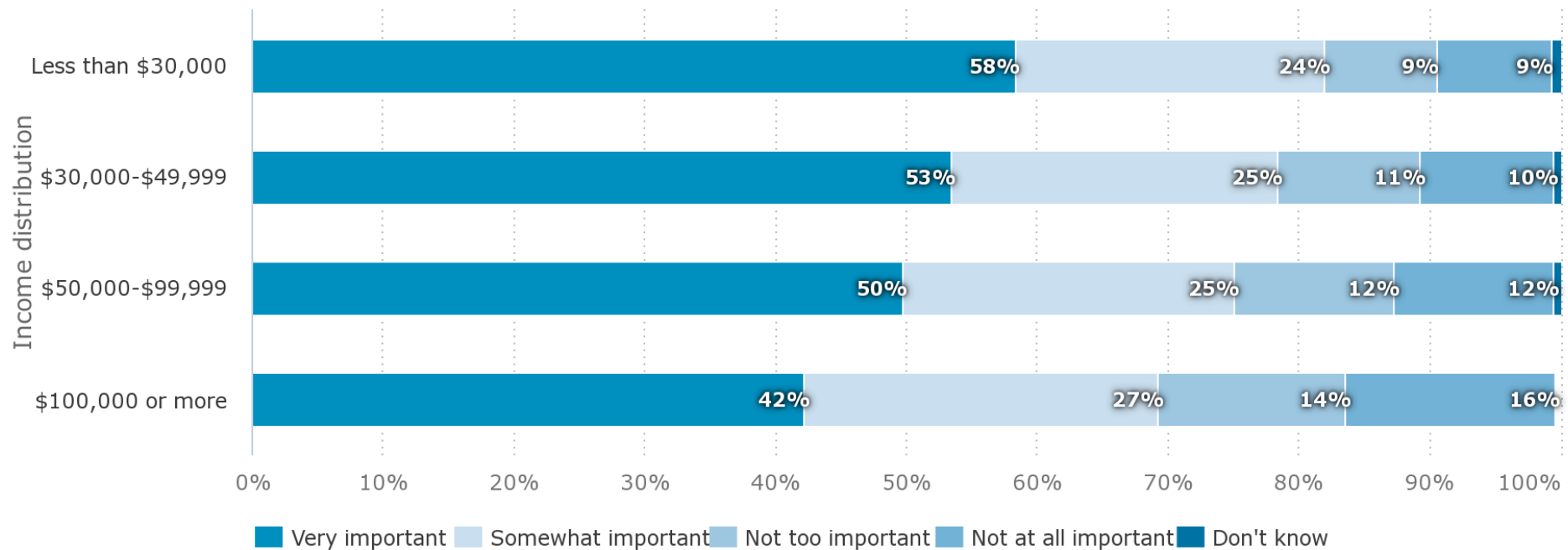
Religion is more important to women than it is to men.



SES and Religion

Importance of religion in one's life by household income

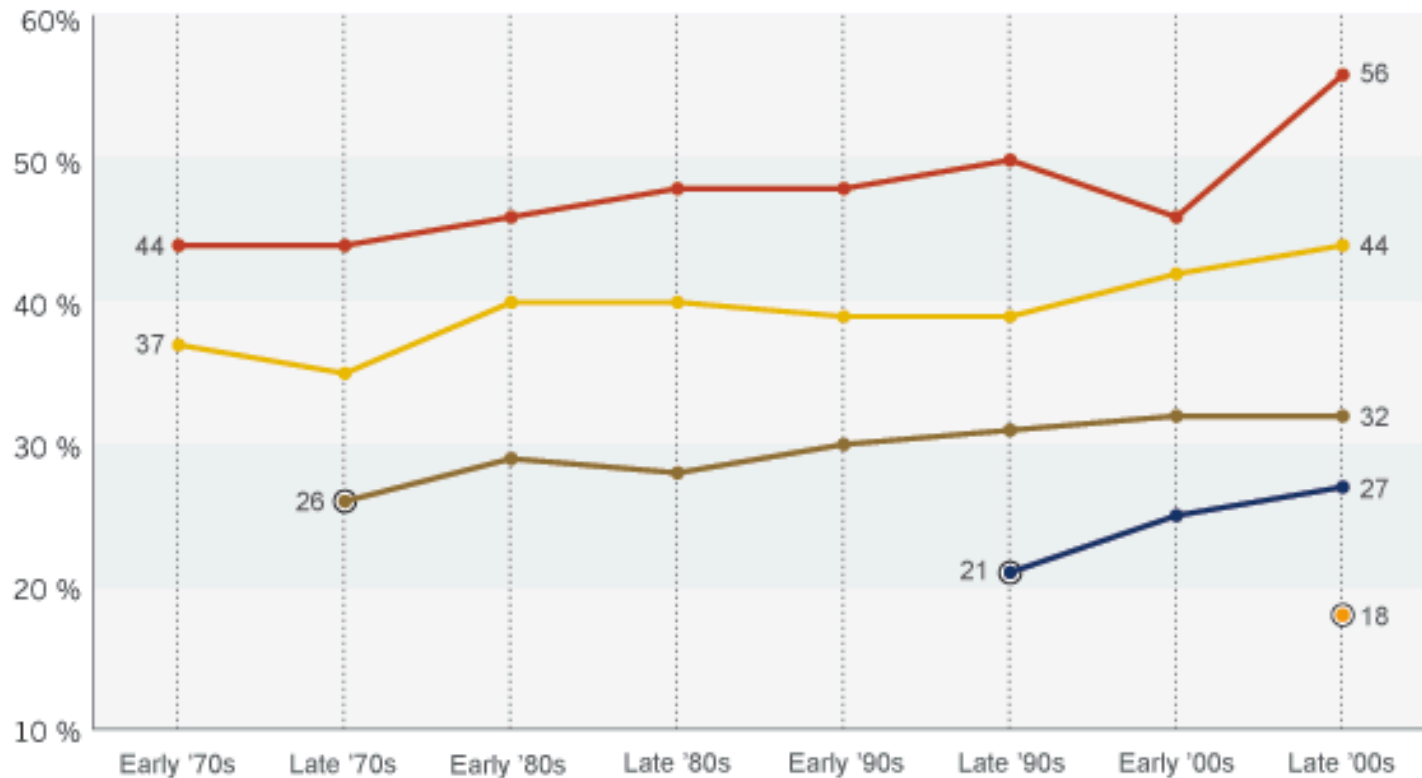
% of adults who say religion is...



Generation and Religion

Attendance at Religious Services, by Generation

Percent saying they attend several times a week, every week or nearly every week



Source: General Social Surveys.

Question wording: How often do you attend religious services?

[RESPONSE CATEGORIES, USED AS PROBES AS NECESSARY: Never, less than once a year, about once or twice a year, several times a year, about once a month, two to three times a month, nearly every week, every week, several times a week.]

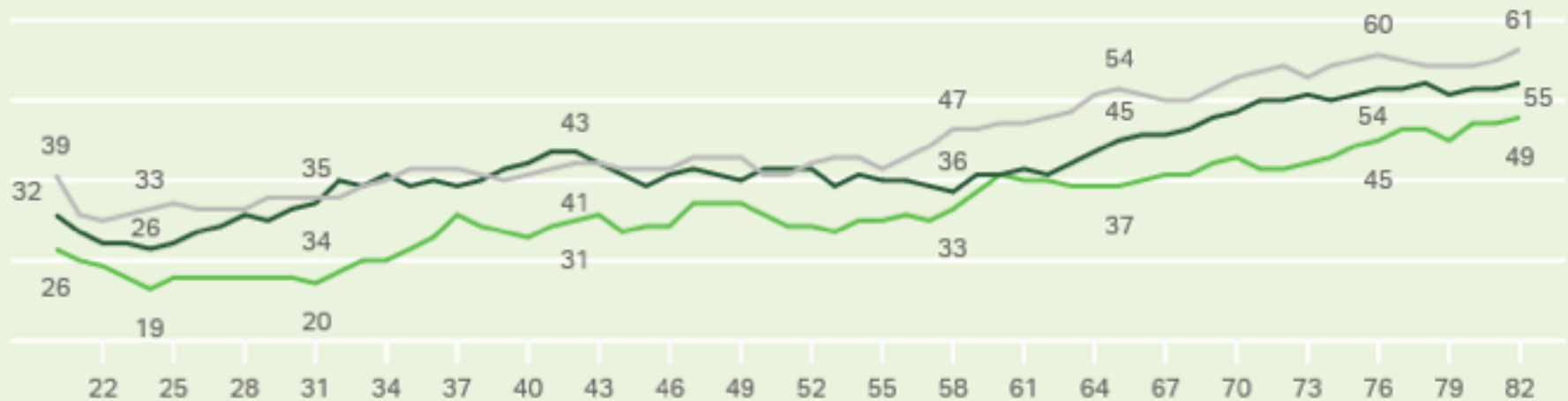
- Millennial (born 1981 or later)
- Gen X (born 1965-80)
- Boomer (born 1946-64)
- Silent (born 1928-45)
- Greatest (born before 1928)
- ⦿ Indicates point when generations were at comparable ages

Age and Religion

Church Attendance Increases With Age

% Attending weekly or almost weekly -- three-year rolling averages

2019 2009 2002



GALLUP



GENERAL MENTAL HEALTH & RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

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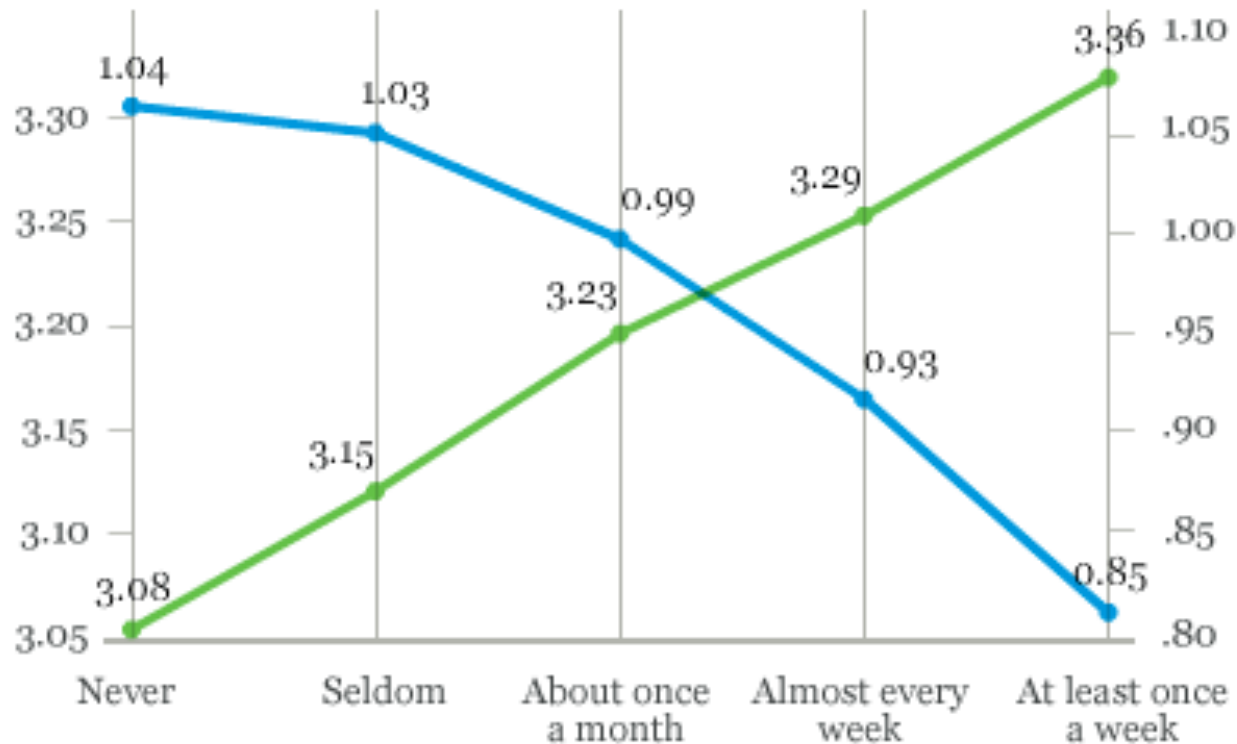
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General Trends with Mood

Average Number of Daily Positive and Negative Emotions, by Church Attendance

■ Positive ■ Negative



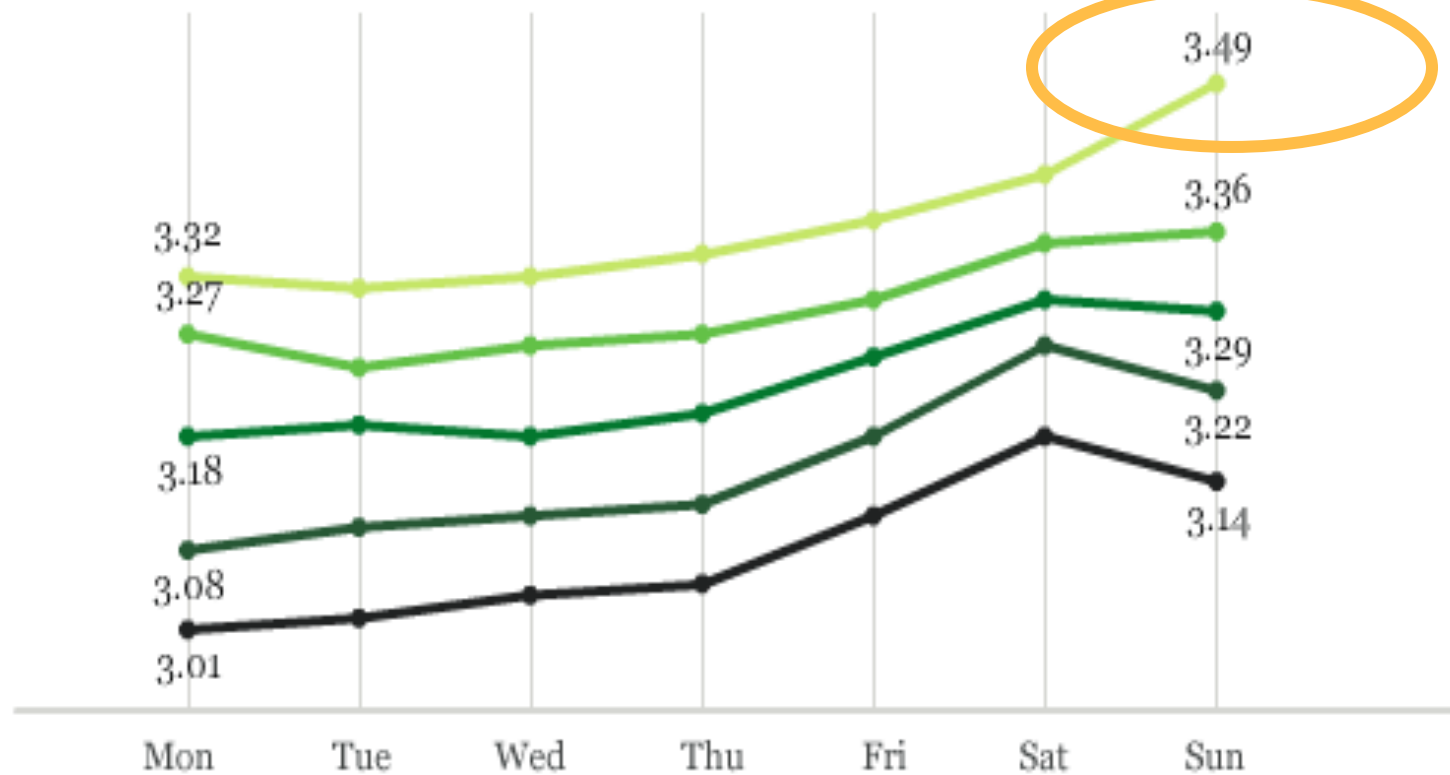
Jan. 2-Dec. 31, 2011

Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index

Mood

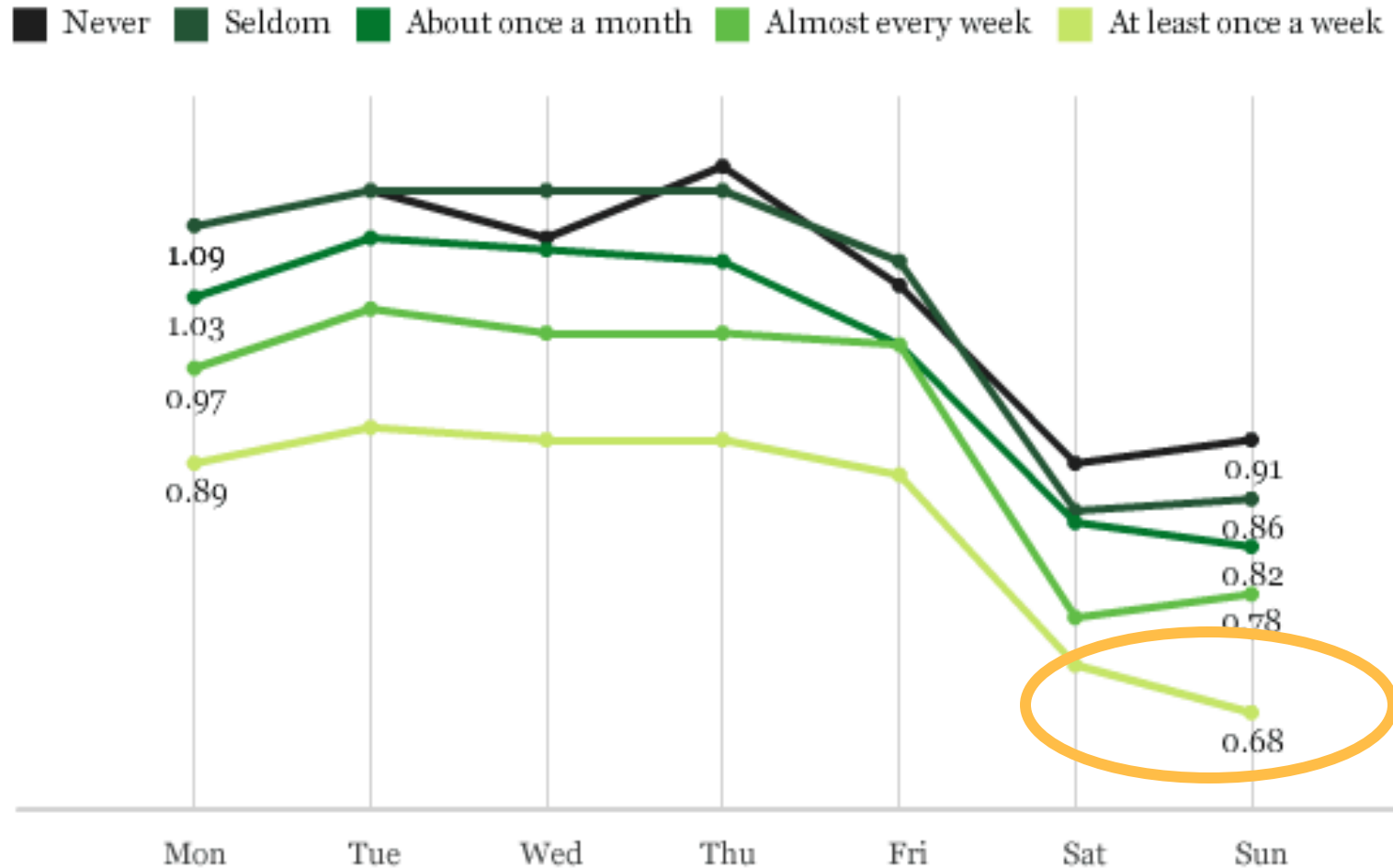
Church Attendance and Positive Emotions, by Day of the Week

■ Never ■ Seldom ■ About once a month ■ Almost every week ■ At least once a week



Mood

Church Attendance and Negative Emotions, by Day of the Week



RS is Associated with Many Positive Outcomes

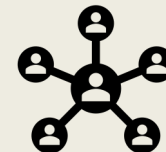
- ⤴ Greater health-promoting behaviors and psychological health (see Bonelli & Koenig, 2013 and AbdAleati et al., 2016 for review)
- ⤴ Less depression, loneliness, anxiety (AbdAleati et al., 2016; Baetz et al., 2004; Gillum, et al., 2006; Wink et al., 2005)
- ⤴ Less suicidal ideation and behavior (Bonelli & Koenig, 2013; Huguelet et al., 2006)
- ⤴ Less alcohol and drug use, delinquency, crime (Bjarnason et al., 2005; Bonelli & Koenig, 2013; Dew et al., 2008)
- ⤴ Higher self esteem, hope, purpose, meaning (Chen, 2006)
- ⤴ Higher marital adjustment, social support (George et al., 2000)
- ⤴ Higher life satisfaction (Salsman et al., 2005)
- ⤴ Better coping with illness and stressors, bereavement (Yangarber-Hicks, 2004)
- ⤴ Enhanced sense of well being, optimism (Salsman et al., 2005)



Beliefs



Practices



Community



TRAUMA AND PTSD & RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

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Trauma Typically Associated with Negative Outcomes



- Traumatic exposure can either weaken or strengthen religious faith (Park et al., 2017)
- People who lose their faith in the context of trauma have worse mental health outcomes (Ben-Ezra et al., 2010; Fontana & Rosenheck, 2004; Ter Kuile et al., 2014)
- Spiritual distress predicts more severe PTSD symptoms in cross sectional, longitudinal, and cross-lag studies (Currier et al. 2015; Harris et al., 2008, Harris et al., 2012)



Beliefs



Practices



Community



Trauma's Impact on Belief Systems



Traumatic experiences can lead to significant changes in one's cognitions or beliefs (Foa et al., 2007; Resick et al., 2017)

1. Self (e.g., I caused the trauma)
2. Others (e.g., People can't be trusted)
3. World (e.g., The world is a dangerous place)

Trauma-related cognitions predict PTSD recovery (Schumm et al., 2015)

1. Blame/Guilt
2. Safety
3. Trust
4. Power and control
5. Self-esteem/confidence
6. Intimacy



Trauma's Impact on Belief Systems



People's religious beliefs typically do not change because of trauma, but there is significant adverse changes in people's religious beliefs for those who develop PTSD (Leo et al., 2019)

1. Self in relation to God (e.g., I am abandoned by God)
2. God-image (e.g., God is punishing); God-complexity (e.g., God as being one dimension/one role)
 - Negative self and God-image, and lower God-complexity are related to poorer mental health outcomes (Borras et al., 2007; Bradshaw et al., 2008; Cooper-White, 2011; Sharp et al., 2017; Sharp, George, & Cheng, in prep)
3. Theodicy (why evil/suffering exists)
 - Retribution theodicy related to higher levels of distress among those managing PTSD (Harris, Usset & Cheng, 2018)



RS PTSD “Stuckpoints”



“God is to be blamed for my trauma”

- Responsibility pie chart

“God is not good for allowing this to happen”

- Socratic dialogue around patient’s understanding of free-will, role of “evil/Satan” in the world, etc.

“God has abandoned me”

- Jesus’ response to Lazarus’ death
 - When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “**Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**” (John 11: 32)
- “Jesus wept” (John 11:35)



Meaning-making



Making wine/refining fire



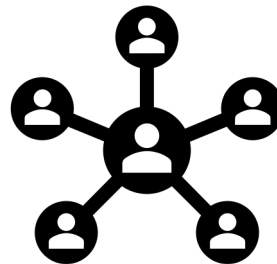
Lotus flower



Trauma and RS practices and community



Practices



Community

- Silence and solitude
- Gratitude/thanksgiving
- Fasting
- Prayer
- Generosity/giving
- Forgiveness
- Sabbath



Future Directions



- RS PTSD cognitions/stuckpoints
- CPT outcomes by RS
- Training Program for integrating RS into PTSD treatments

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RS Resources

Websites/Teachings

- Spiritual Practices and teachings [practictheway.org]
- Daily Contemplative Prayer and Meditations through Bridgetown Church Podcast [bridgetown.church/series/bridgetown-daily]
- Contemplative Prayers [contemplativeoutreach.org]

Books

- The Shack by William Young
- Walking with God through Pain and Suffering by Tim Keller

Resources: Professional Organizations and Agencies

- American Psychological Association, Division 36, Psychology of Religion and Spirituality [www.apa.org/divisions/div36]
- Society of Behavioral Medicine, Spirituality and Health Special Interest Group (SIG) [www.sbm.org/sig/spirituality/]
- International Association for the Psychology of Religion [www.iapr.de]
- Society for the Scientific Study of Religion [www.sssrweb.org]
- Santa Clara University Spirituality and Health Institute
- [www.scu.edu/ignatiancenter/spirithealth/index.cfm]
- Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC), the American Counseling Association [<http://aservic.org>]
- Association for Transpersonal Psychology [www.atpweb.org]
- Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) [www.caps.net/index.html]
- Psychology of Religion website: [www.psywww.com/psyrelig]
- John Templeton Foundation [www.templeton.org]



Q&A?

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EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE: WELCOMING PRAYER

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